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# Altruism in Social Systems



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## Justice and Prosocial Commitments

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### Introduction

It is a widespread opinion among philosophers and psychologists that altruistic acts are motivated by charitable love or sympathy toward the needy (Bloom, 1981; Hoffman, 1981; Staub, 1978). Of course, altruism might be defined by just this kind of motivation. However, we also know of helpful concern for others in fulfillment of obligations set by social or personal norms. Staub (1978) has distinguished between two types of prosocial goals: prosocial orientation and orientation toward duty and obligation. Rushton (1981) has distinguished between empathic and normative altruism.

The present study focuses on one category of normative altruism: prosocial commitments motivated by perceived injustice and aimed at removing injustice. The thesis of this chapter is that when we perceive people who suffer misery and needs that seem undeserved we will be motivated to retribute justice. Prosocial activities in their favor are one way to attempt this. Of course, there are alternative ways to re-establish justice. One alternative may be to reinterpret the misery of the needy as deserved or as self-inflicted: These appraisals, subjectively, cancel injustice. Another way could be to blame and to punish those who are responsible for the misery.

We investigated the motivational impact of perceived injustice on prosocial commitments (spending money, political support, joining a supportive activity group) by confronting the subjects with the fates of people who were far less fortunate than themselves: unemployed people, poor people in the developing countries, and foreign (Turkish) guest workers in West Germany. These groups were selected as examples from a long list of people suffering severe hardships all over the world: those living in relative deprivation of various kinds, those living under political repression, those having severe health problems, those who live in social isolation, and so forth.

Whereas in social psychology there is a rich literature on the experience of relative deprivation (Crosby, 1976; Olson, Herman, & Zanna, 1986), comparatively little is known about the experience of relative privileges. However, the issue of justice may be raised not only from a deprived position but also from a privileged one. There is evidence that a change in the distribution of income is claimed by parts of all social strata including the wealthier ones (Hochschild, 1981). There are casual observations that not all privileged and advantaged people tend to preserve and defend their privileges: Some share them with the less fortunate, and others engage in political

activities with the aim to change the social system and to establish a greater fairness. In the history of revolutions, there are many examples showing that members of the privileged strata of a society became the leaders of the deprived in the combat for justice. Keniston (1968) and Haan (1975) studied the engagement of American youth in the Civil Rights Movement. They observed that many of the educated students living in middle class families in wealth and security initiated this combat and participated in it to ensure the equality of the black minority.

The key question of the present study was: Who are the people that respond responsibly and supportively when being confronted with needs and problems of the less fortunate and the disadvantaged. This question "Who?" can be answered on different levels: on the level of demographic and sociological characteristics and on the level of psychological characteristics (cognitions, emotions, beliefs, motives, attitudes, etc.). Although a large number of demographic variables have been assessed, the present study focused on the psychological ones, especially on cognitions, beliefs, and motives related to justice and to social attitudes toward the disadvantaged.

What do we know about the impact of perceived (in-)justice on prosocial commitments? There are several lines of relevant research. Lerner (1977) has proposed the concept of a justice motive with the central assumption that a basic belief in a just world exists that motivates to reestablish justice whenever justice seems to be disturbed. When confronted with hardships and needs that we perceive as undeserved we tend to help the needy if (a) we are able to help, (b) help is not too costly, and (c) justice will in fact be re-established by the supporting act. The latter might not be true when we can only help one or a few of the needy and many others remain who are similarly deprived and whom we are not able to support (Lerner, 1980). In many cases it might be an easier attempt as well as a more successful one to re-establish justice subjectively by denying injustice, for instance, by assuming that the needs are self-inflicted.

A second line of research is on feelings of guilt that motivate prosocial behavior. Feelings of guilt may be a result of having violated a moral norm and/or of having inflicted a harm or hardship on another person. A prerequisite for the arousal of guilt is that the inflicted harm or hardship will not be perceived as having been deserved. This is where the issue of justice comes into play. In case of a justified punishment, guilt feelings are not expected; they would be expected if a norm of justice is hurt, and if the subject feels at least some responsibility for it. The effects of guilt on prosocial behavior are usually studied in experiments in which subjects were led to believe that they had caused a mishap that detracted another person, for example, knocking over a filing box or damaging an expensive machine. Tobey-Klass (1978) and Rosenhan, Salovey, P., Karylowski, J., & Hargis, K. (1981) summarized reported empirical findings and theoretical interpretations. After the apparent mishap, a higher rate of prosocial activities was usually observed that were not restricted to the person suffering the harm the subject seemingly had caused. Instead, a generalized readiness for prosocial behavior was observed. Therefore, reparation or compensation (Berkowitz & Connor, 1966) cannot be considered to be the sole aim.

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Feelings of guilt may imply the urge for expiation (Wallington, 1973), which might be satisfied by prosocial activities, as well as the loss of self-esteem, which might be regained through a good deed (Cialdini, Darley, & Vincent, 1973; Levin & Isen, 1975). Cunningham, Steinberg, and Grev (1980) found evidence for both hypotheses.

A third line of research concerns the obligation to prosocial activities based on specific norms of justice such as the norm of reciprocity requiring a person to reciprocate received help and favors. The norm of reciprocity may instigate feelings of indebtedness in the sense of a felt liability for reciprocal prosocial behavior (Greenberg, 1980). In cases like this, the readiness to prosocial activities is not a generalized one. It is directed specifically to the people one is indebted to. It is aimed to balance the exchange with these people (Adams, 1965).

### *Responsibility and Justice*

The issue of justice can be raised with every observation of a person or group of individuals suffering a need or hardship. To state justice or injustice, the key question to be answered is: Who is responsible? If the needy persons themselves are considered responsible for their mental, social, financial, health or whatever problems they might have, then this is not a case of injustice: Failure in an examination or loss of a job because of laziness, poverty that is self-inflicted by risk-gambling at the stock market, loss of freedom because of legal punishment for a committed crime, or cancer of the lungs because of heavy smoking, all these are not considered to be unjust (Montada, 1990).

Injustice presupposes that problems were either inflicted by someone else or that a third agent or agency (considered to be able and obligated to do this) did not prevent them. However, attributions of responsibility are subjective, and there is a lot of interindividual as well as intraindividual variation depending on (a) the information that is available (or selected); (b) attitudes toward the needy and potential agents; (c) motivational dispositions such as belief in a just world (Lerner, 1977), the motive to defend one's belief in one's own invulnerability, in one's belief to have control over one's fate (Shaver, 1970; Walster, 1966). Many people want to be able to state "That would not have happened to me." Blaming the victim (Ryan, 1971) is one strategy to confirm this belief.

Considering the examples given above, alternative attributions are possible that provoke appraisals of justice: To fail an examination may also be attributed to a prejudice of the teacher, the student's laziness may be excused as a consequence of educational failures by the parents or the school, losses at the stock market might be attributed to irresponsible counseling by a broker, the crime committed may be attributed to a general injustice of the society that did not offer equal opportunities for a positive development to everyone, and smoking might be considered to be the result of a stressful job or of irresponsible advertising by the tobacco industry. The question who attributes responsibility to whom in what cases, the person perceptions, and the world views a person has, all these factors may reveal aspects of

the motive systems. In the present study we assessed belief in a just world, the two principles of distributive justice that have implications on the "construction" of (in-)justice and responsibility: the equity principle and the need principle, and social attitudes toward the disadvantaged.

Concerning the needs and problems of the three groups of people considered in the present study (unemployed people, poor people in the developing countries, and foreign guest workers), two variables were assessed that represent attributions of responsibility: (1) perceiving the needs as being self-inflicted by the less fortunate (e.g., assuming laziness or inability) and (2) perceiving causal interrelationships between own advantages and the disadvantages of the less fortunate (e.g., in the case of the developing countries by assessing their exploitation by the rich industrial states). Whereas the first variable is expected to be negatively related to the perception of any kind of injustice, the second one should be positively related since it implies some own responsibility for the existence of the disadvantages, at least in the sense of accepting own advantages at the cost of the disadvantaged.

### *Justice and Emotions*

Justice is a central aspect in social life. Injustice causes aversive emotions that imply motives to re-establish justice by protest, retaliation, or compensation. It is supposed that perceived injustice raises emotions such as moral outrage or existential guilt depending on the attribution of responsibility for the existence of the disadvantages. These emotions may motivate prosocial commitments either in the form of charitable help or in the form of demanding just distributions from those in politics and economics who are responsible. The impact on prosocial commitments of the two emotions that imply perceptions of injustice was compared to the impact of further emotions that might possibly be aroused when being confronted with needs of the less fortunate: sympathy, anger about the disadvantaged because their needs are considered self-inflicted, fear to lose own advantages if claims of the less fortunate for redistribution were successful, contentment with one's own better situation, and hopelessness concerning their future. The prediction of these emotions on the basis of appraisals, attitudes, and beliefs is outlined elsewhere (Montada & Schneider, 1989). In this chapter, the focus is merely on their motivational impact.

Sympathy is considered to be a prerequisite of altruism and a dominant motive of prosocial behavior (Hoffman, 1976, 1982; Krebs, 1975; Staub, 1978; Stotland, 1969). What is implied by sympathy is often called empathic concern (Batson, 1987) or sympathetic distress (Hoffman, 1982) with a person in need as contrasted to personal distress that may also be aroused when viewing another person in distress. Batson's concept of personal distress means that the subject feels bad and that he or she is concerned with his own or her own distress rather than with the distress of the needy person. Personal distress has been found to dispose to leaving the distressing situation rather than to engaging in prosocial activities.

As mentioned before, feelings of guilt will generally dispose to prosocial activities. In the present study we assessed existential guilt. What does existential

guilt mean? In several studies, guilt feelings were reported by people experiencing a lucky advantage compared to others: This has been observed with the survivors of concentration camps (Von Baeyer, Haefner, & Kisker, 1964), with the survivors of Hiroshima, and with discharged prisoners of war in Korea (Lifton, 1967). In close relationships, existential guilt indicates that the well-being of a loved one is equally or even more important than one's own well-being. Relative advantages are neither aimed at nor are they appreciated (Montada, 1990). Outside close relationships, existential guilt will be expected when own advantages do not appear to be fully deserved and justified compared to the disadvantages of others (Hoffman, 1976), when these others are perceived as needy, when they are not excluded from one's own community of responsibility (Deutsch, 1985), and when a responsibility of some kind for their existing and continuing needs will be accepted (Montada, Dalbert, & Schmitt, 1986; Montada & Schneider, 1989). Existential guilt motivates to prosocial activities.

Moral outrage or resentment is equally instigated by perceived injustice. Contrary to guilt, subjects do not consider themselves to be responsible for the existing disadvantages. Instead, they attribute responsibility to someone else. Resentment disposes to accuse those who are responsible and to claim compensation for the disadvantaged from them. Prosocial commitments may have various forms such as charitable help or political support. Consequently, resentment rather disposes to the latter. To our knowledge, there are no empirical studies that deal directly with outrage and altruism. However, Keniston's (1968) study on the engagement of middle-class students in the Civil Rights Movement which was cited above, is an example of indirect evidence. Whereas Hoffman (1976) has interpreted this engagement as evidence of existential guilt feelings, the dominant emotion might possibly have been resentment at society. Their commitment was certainly born out of perceived social injustice.

Anger at the disadvantaged is supposed to interfere with prosocial commitments. It is to be expected when claims of the disadvantaged for redistribution are appraised as unjustified, for instance, when the disadvantages are considered to be self-inflicted. Anger implies a kind of blaming the needy, and this disposes to refusing help (Piliavin, Rodin, & Piliavin, 1969; Ryan, 1971). In an attributional analysis of helping behavior, Ickes and Kidd (1976) have hypothesized that help would not be offered to individuals who were perceived as having caused their bad fate themselves. This has been supported empirically by Meyer and Mulherin (1980).

Three further emotions were expected to interfere with prosocial commitments: contentment with one's own advantages, fear to lose own advantages, and hopelessness with respect to any improvement in the fate of the disadvantaged. Contentment with own advantages when being confronted with the hardship of others is not a sign of empathic concern but rather a sign of an egocentric perspective. The same is true for the emotion fear to lose own advantages. Hopelessness by the very meaning of the concept should not motivate to any activity that would be considered futile. These hypotheses are outlined in more detail elsewhere (Montada & Schneider, 1989).

### *The Impact of Views on Justice*

To speak of injustice presupposes norms of justice. As far as distributive justice is concerned, there are principles of allocation such as the equity principle, the need principle, the equality principle, the principle of equal opportunity, or principles of procedural justice when the decision is negotiated.

These principles may be one basis to build up entitlements. (There are others such as contracts, human rights, or position-related privileges.) The present study focused on the role of two principles of distributive justice: the equity principle meaning that the distribution is fair as long as it is proportional to the achievements or inputs, and the need principle stating that the distribution is fair as long as the needier ones receive more of the scarce goods to be distributed.

Certainly, there are cultural, systemic, context-specific, and individual differences in selecting and applying such principles when entitlements are established, justified, or questioned (Deutsch, 1975; Leventhal, 1976; Steil & Makowski, 1989; Törnblom & Foa, 1983). As Schmitt and Montada (1982) have confirmed empirically, the use of these principles depends not only on the social contexts and the goods to be allocated but also on generalized individual preferences concerning these principles. Their impact on the perception of injustice is obvious: A positive view of the need principle will lead to considering the continuing existence of needs as unjust and it will require a reallocation. In contrast, subjects with a positive view of the equity principle will consider the needs of a disadvantaged person as just and deserved when they result from poor performance and false behavior of the needy.

### *The Impact of Belief in a Just World*

Another justice-related belief was assessed and its impact was studied: the belief in a just world (BJW; Lerner, 1977, 1980), meaning that everyone gets what he or she deserves and that everyone deserves what he or she gets. BJW is conceived of as a motive disposing to reduce observed injustice if this is possible, and it disposes to deny injustice if reducing it would be too costly or risky.

Confronted with large populations and groups of people who are less fortunate than oneself, it is impossible for any single subject to establish justice by a redistribution. Consequently, it is easier to defend the belief in a just world by interpreting the existing disadvantages as self-inflicted and not as inflicted by circumstances, the society, or other people. The belief in justice is also defended by giving justifications for one's own advantages. Both appraisals (self-infliction of the disadvantages and justification of one's own advantages as deserved) are supported by arguments offered by the equity principle: Actual differences in wealth and quality of life are correlated with achievements and merits.

### *The Impact of Social Attitudes*

When thinking about psychological factors that contribute to the engagement in prosocial commitments, social attitudes toward the needy are one of them to come into mind. Attitudes may influence social responsibility toward the needy, and they may determine the answer to the question whether or not the needy are considered to be included within one's own community of solidarity and responsibility. General sympathy for the needy and being attracted to them may also depend on positive attitudes.

In the present study, attitudes were operationalized as the attribution of positive and negative traits to the disadvantaged. This variable was included as an indicator of experienced social closeness or distance to the disadvantaged as well as of the presence or absence of a derogative tendency. Being distanced to the disadvantaged as well as derogating them were both expected to interfere with prosocial commitments.

### *The Impact of Ability and Opportunity to Support the Needy*

So far, we have focused on motivational factors. Of course, prosocial commitments presuppose not only motivations but also abilities and/or resources to support the needy (Schwartz, 1977). In the present study, we assessed several categories of support such as spending some money, signing a petition to the administrations, participating in a demonstration, and joining an activity group working on behalf of the needy. The supportive activities could have been either charitable or more political ones aimed at a change in political or economic systems. As far as the unemployed were concerned, we assessed the readiness of subjects to renounce part of their income (so that new jobs could be created and paid for) and their perceived abilities and resources to contribute to an improvement. It was hypothesized that this latter variable in addition to the motivational variables would contribute to the prediction of readiness to prosocial commitments.

## **Method**

### *Subjects*

Eight hundred and sixty-five subjects participated in the study; all had a privileged status with respect to education (university students), wealth or social security (civil servants with tenure, business people and employers, citizens living in relatively prosperous neighborhoods); 59% were males, 41% females. The age of the subjects ranged from 18 to 86 with a mean of 36 years. The study was designed longitudinally with one replication three months after the first wave of assessment. The replication study contained 434 subjects who were randomly selected from the

total sample. Data reported in this chapter were derived from this replication study. All major patterns of results were very similar to those of the first study.

### *Operationalization of Concepts*

#### *Variables assessed with the Existential Guilt Inventory (ESI)*

Many of the core variables were assessed by the "Existential Guilt Inventory" (ESI; Montada et al., 1986). This inventory measures several appraising cognitions and emotional reactions by confronting the subject with written scenarios describing the problems and the misery experienced by members of three groups of less fortunate people: (a) People out of work and unemployed adolescents who have never had a job or received vocational training, (b) poor people in the developing countries, and (c) Turkish foreign workers living in West Germany. The problems presented included financial problems, insecurity concerning the future, bad and exploitative working conditions, inadequate medical care, poor housing, and loss of personal and social status. Three different scenarios were included for each group of disadvantaged persons.

One of the three scenarios describing problems and needs of poor people in the developing countries is given as an example:

Imagine you are watching a television feature about young people in the developing countries. As an example they are showing a South American metropolis: Two thirds of the residents live in the slums, thousands of children and adolescents have lost their parents. If they do not want to starve they have to search the garbage for food, go begging, or try to survive by committing petty crimes. Only a few of them have a real chance to graduate from school and get a regular job. A priest summarizes the situation: The hardest thing for me is to make the youngsters hope for a better future. How should this ever improve? Why should they go to school? They won't learn anything that would help them to survive.

After presenting each scenario, emotional and cognitive variables were assessed in varying sequences by preformulated statements expressing specific thoughts or feelings about the problems described in each scenario. Using 6-point rating scales, the subjects were asked to rate the degree to which these statements expressed their own thoughts or feelings (*that is exactly what I'm thinking or feeling* (1) and *that is not at all what I'm thinking or feeling* (6)). The items for the scenario shown above are listed as examples.

#### (a) Emotional reactions:

- *existential guilt* about one's own advantages relative to the privation of the disadvantaged ("Comparing my situation to that of these youngsters my conscience starts bothering me.");

- resentment or *moral outrage* because of the injustice of the relative disadvantages observed ("I get mad about the fact that adolescents in the developing countries are so handicapped.");
- *sympathy* for the disadvantaged ("Considering their predicament, I feel sympathy for these youngsters.");
- *anger* at the disadvantaged ("I get angry when I see how little these people do to get out of their situation.");
- *fear of losing one's own advantages* or about a possible deterioration of one's own situation ("How far will poverty and misery lead us yet: One of these days our own situation will get worse, and that makes me afraid.");
- *contentment* with one's own situation ("It makes me feel good to think that the situation in our country is different.");
- *hopelessness* concerning the future of the disadvantaged ("Honestly, I have little hope that there will be a change in the situation for the youngsters in the developing countries.");

(b) Cognitive appraisals:

- *perception of disadvantages as being self-inflicted* ("People in the developing countries don't do anything about their situation. No wonder that the problems increase chaotically.");
- *minimization of the disadvantages of the needy* ("I think we should not judge their situation by our standards. These youngsters know nothing else. That's why I don't consider their situation to be that bad.");
- *justification of one's own advantages* ("It is not by chance that our economic situation is better. We are better equipped to handle problems than the people in the developing countries. There is no doubt about that.");
- *perceived injustice of differences* between the quality of one's own life and the life of the group of disadvantaged people described in a scenario ("It is gravely unjust that people in the developing countries are so much worse off than we are.") (note that the injustice of disadvantages should be appraised in relation to the respondent's own life situation);
- *perceived interrelatedness of fates*, that is, between one's own advantages and the problems of the disadvantaged ("We in the industrial nations contribute to provoke the misery in the developing countries."). This variable may mean the perception of implicit responsibility for the existing disadvantages of others.

(c) Perceived responsibility to help the needy:

Subjects were asked to rate

- how much they *felt own responsibility* to help ("Whenever I see things like this I feel called upon to help solve these problems.");

- how much they *attributed responsibility to others*, meaning how much they perceived powerful others and institutions to be responsible for help, such as state, government, trade unions, etc. ("It is mainly up to governments to do something.");

Since there were three scenarios for each of the three disadvantaged groups in the ESI, the scores for each variable could be aggregated either across the three items concerning each problem group or across all nine items. Only scores that were aggregated across all nine items are reported in the present chapter. The usual psychometric criteria were used to assess adequate homogeneity, reliability, and consistency of the scales (Schneider, Montada, Reichle, & Meissner, 1986).

*Scales to measure "Background" variables*

Aside from the ESI, additional variables were included in the study. They were assessed by several newly developed scales (Schneider et al., 1986) including the following that were introduced above as "background" variables. Once again, the usual psychometric criteria were employed to establish homogeneity and internal consistency of the scales, which were deemed adequate.

(a) Justice-related variables

*Belief in a just world* (BJW) was assessed on two levels of generality: General BJW was assessed with a scale containing items that were formulated in a very general way (e.g., "I think that, in general, there is justice in the world."), while specific BJW was assessed with a scale containing items specifically addressing the problems and needs of the three groups of disadvantaged persons in this study (e.g., "I think, there are no unjustified differences in wealth between the developing countries and the industrial nations."). These items also had to be rated on 6-point scales with the poles *exactly* (1) and *not at all* (6). Data from several studies on the reliability and validity of both scales are summarized in Dalbert, Montada, and Schmitt (1987).

As expected from both the theoretical arguments and the empirical evidence (Schmitt, Dalbert, & Montada, 1985), the BJW assessed with the specific scales was more closely related to all other variables focusing on the same specific areas and contents.

The same was true for *views on allocation principles*. Two of them, the view of the equity principle and the view of the need principle were also assessed with both a general scale and with scales specific to the issues of the three groups of disadvantaged people. Example items are given for the latter ones only.

- *Views on the equity principle of allocation* were assessed with items like, "It is just that economy and government select the most efficient applicants when unemployment is high."
- *Views on the need principle of allocation* were assessed with items like, "It would be just if foreign workers were supported by an independent government office when looking for living quarters to avoid their being taken advantage of."

**(b) Social attitudes**

Social attitudes were assessed in the form of attributions of positive and negative traits to each group of disadvantaged persons on 6-point rating scales, for example,

- *attribution of positive traits* to a group of disadvantaged persons (e.g., "Among the Turkish foreign workers *almost all of them* (1), *almost none of them* (6) are decent people."),
- *attribution of negative traits* to a group of disadvantaged persons (e.g., "Among the unemployed *almost all of them* (1), *almost none of them* (6) are unwilling to work.").

***Readiness to Prosocial Commitments***

Questionnaires to assess respondent's *readiness to make prosocial commitments* included items concerning four categories of activities that would provide help to each of the three groups of disadvantaged: (1) spending money, (2) signing a petition addressed to political leaders or institutions, (3) participating in a demonstration aimed at claiming justice for the disadvantaged, and (4) joining an activity group that is supporting the needy and helping to solve their problems. Each category was represented by two items for each of the three problem groups. For the group of the unemployed, we also assessed subjects' readiness to renounce part of their wages (so that new jobs could be created and paid for). Again, items had to be rated on 6-point scales. Scores used in the present chapter were aggregated across the items concerning all three groups of the disadvantaged.

***Establishing the External Validity of Self-Ratings***

Since all data were based on self-ratings, their external validity was tested by asking a subsample to name three persons (acquaintances, friends, relatives) who would be both willing and able to provide information about them. These "external" raters were asked to imagine how the subject would answer some of the questions in the questionnaires. In this way we were able to obtain *external ratings on a selected set of core variables* for 173 subjects. These were used to estimate the external validity of the self-ratings. Nearly 80% of the external raters (mostly friends and close relatives) stated that their acquaintance with the subjects was very good or good (on a 6-point scale ranging from very good to poor). Results confirmed the validity of the data assessed via self-reports. The mean correlations between self-ratings and external ratings were .35 for prosocial commitments (ranging from .11 to .50) and .47 for the ESI-variable (ranging from .39 to .51). When evaluating the correlation coefficients one should keep in mind that the sample of relevant observations made by the external raters was probably small for many variables.

**Results and Discussion**

This section consists of five parts: (1) To provide an overview of results, zero-order correlations are given of all variables introduced so far to the three target variables: felt own responsibility to support the needy, prosocial commitments for the needy, and attribution of responsibility for support to powerful others (governments, institutions, economy). (2) The key prediction variable "perceived injustice of disadvantages" will be analyzed by a multiple regression analysis to attributions of responsibility and traits and to justice-related "background" variables. (3) A path model for the prediction of prosocial commitments with perceived injustice and perceived own possibilities for support will be presented and discussed. (4) The impact of emotional reactions to needs and problems of others on prosocial commitments will be outlined and discussed. (5) The prediction of readiness to rather costly renunciation of own advantages will be mentioned briefly.

***Correlates of Prosocial Commitments and Social Responsibility for the Disadvantaged***

Preliminary information about the hypotheses outlined in the introduction can be drawn from Table I that shows zero-order correlations between all potential predictors (and the mediating variables) assessed and prosocial commitments, felt own responsibility for the support of the needy, and the attribution of responsibility to powerful others (state, governments, economy, and so forth). Of course, the interrelations between these variables and their relative weights in predicting prosocial commitments were analyzed in multivariate models that will be presented and discussed later. At this point we would like to draw attention to some features of the results.

- Two of the target variables, prosocial commitments (aggregated across all categories and across all three groups of disadvantaged people) and felt own responsibility to support the needy, show the same pattern of correlates. Most correlations, positive as well as negative ones, have a substantial height, and the pattern of correlations fits the outlined hypotheses well with very few exceptions. Correlates of both target variables are appraisals of injustice; the three prosocial emotions guilt, outrage, and sympathy; the view of the need principle; positive attitudes toward the disadvantaged; and perceiving own advantages and the disadvantages of the needy as causally interrelated (which means assuming some own responsibility for the existing needs and problems of the less fortunate).

In contrast, variables indicating denial of injustice, minimization of disadvantages, justification of own advantages, perception of disadvantages as self-inflicted, and specific BJW are negatively correlated with felt own responsibility to support the needy and prosocial commitments for them; anger about the disadvantaged is an emotional indicator. The view of the equity

**Table I: Justice-Related Appraisals and Background Variables, Social Attitudes, and Readiness to Prosocial Commitments for the Disadvantaged (Aggregated Scores; Zero-Order Correlations, 434 > N > 402)**

Variables	Aggregated commitment scores	Felt own respon- sibility to sup- port the needy	Attribution of responsibility for others
<b>Justice-related appraisals</b>			
Disadvantages perceived as unjust	.49	.65	.36
Minimization of disadvantages	-.21	-.36	n.s.
Own relative advantages perceived as deserved	-.17	-.33	.14
<b>Justice-related background variables</b>			
View of the equity principle			
- general scale	-.16	-.18	n.s.
- specific scale	-.23	-.31	n.s.
View of the need principle			
- general scale	.36	.32	.20
- specific scale	.45	.53	.44
Belief in a just world			
- general scale	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
- specific scale	-.19	-.30	n.s.
<b>Appraisals of responsibility</b>			
Disadvantages perceived as self-inflicted	-.24	-.42	n.s.
Perceived interrelatedness of own advantages and the disadvantages of others	.49	.54	.34
<b>Social attitudes toward the disadvantaged</b>			
Attribution of positive traits	.35	.43	n.s.
Attribution of negative traits	-.16	-.32	-.11*
<b>Emotional responses</b>			
Existential guilt	.44	.69	.28
Moral outrage	.56	.66	.46
Sympathy	.41	.55	.53
Anger	-.11*	-.27	n.s.
Fear	.22	-.15	.31
Contentment	n.s.	n.s.	.24
Hopelessness	n.s.	n.s.	.24

n.s. =  $p > .05$ ; \*  $.01 < p < .05$

principle (that is correlated positively to all of these appraisals) and negative attitudes toward the disadvantaged are also negatively correlated with prosocial commitments and felt own responsibility.

Not expected was the positive correlation with fear to lose own advantages. We assume that quite a few of those who are afraid of losses because of claims for redistribution are motivated to support the needy merely to preserve their own standard of living. Not expected, too, was the fact that contentment with own advantages and hopelessness were not significantly correlated with the two target variables.

- The pattern of correlates of the third target variable, attribution of responsibility to powerful others, is less easy to understand: Most coefficients are low and the pattern of signs is less obvious. It seems that many subjects who do not want to assume the responsibility for the support of the needy themselves are charging the states, the governments, or the economy with it. Justification of one's own advantages, for instance, is negatively correlated with felt own responsibility but positively to the attribution of responsibility to powerful others. It is important to note that existential guilt is correlated much more closely with felt own responsibility than to attribution of responsibility to others. This is true neither for moral outrage, which implies the attribution of responsibility to others, nor for sympathy - a fact that will be discussed later. These two emotions correlated the highest with the third target variable. Fear to lose own advantages, contentment with own advantages, and hopelessness are also correlated positively with attribution of responsibility to others.
- According to expectations, the general justice-related background variables (BJW, view of the equity principle, and view of the need principle) are less closely correlated with the target variable than the respective specific ones, those items focused the three groups of the disadvantaged, just as the target variables did.

The psychological significance of zero-order correlations is limited, of course. The relative weight of the potential predictors may be estimated by multiple regression analyses; the interrelationships of predictors by path analyses.

### *Predictors of Perceived Injustice*

Shown in Table I are zero-order correlations for perceived injustice, justice-related variables, as well as perceived responsibility with prosocial commitments. Perceiving existing needs and the problems of the disadvantages as unjust (compared to one's own advantages) is positively correlated with readiness to prosocial commitments, and, correspondingly, justification of own advantages is negatively correlated. This result was expected on the basis of several lines of conceptualization all stating that perceiving injustice motivates the attempt to reestablish justice.

Conceptually, the attribution of responsibility is crucial for the appraisal of injustice. Injustice presupposes an agent or an agency to be responsible for the existing disadvantages. If the disadvantaged themselves were perceived as being responsible for the existing needs, the question of injustice would not be an issue. Therefore, perceiving disadvantages as self-inflicted was expected to have a negative effect on perceived injustice. If, however, respondents were considering themselves to contribute to the existing disadvantages, for instance, by perceiving their own advantages and the disadvantages of the less fortunate as causally interrelated, then the question should be raised whether or not this was justified. In the case of the unemployed, for instance, there are several own advantages that may be assumed to contribute causally to unemployment such as having a second job, unwillingness to share one's job, a high level of one's own wages, working illegally, and so forth. Consequently, perceived interrelatedness of own advantages and the disadvantages of others was expected to be positively correlated with perceived injustice and, consequently, to dispose to prosocial commitments.

This corresponds to the results of a multiple regression analysis of perceived injustice on attributed responsibility, social attitudes, and the justice-related background variables (Table II). Perceived self-infliction has a negative effect on perceived injustice. The same is true for negative attitudes meaning the attribution of negative traits to the needy. The negative traits are related to poor achievements: They explain existing needs and represent a kind of blame for self-infliction. If the subject perceives his/her own advantages as interrelated with the disadvantages of the less fortunate - which implies some responsibility for their continuing existence - the fate of these people might be perceived as unjust. (Unfortunately, the responsibility of third agents or agencies for the existence of needs had not been assessed. It was only implicitly assessed in moral outrage because of unjust disadvantages.)

As stated above, appraisals of injustice depend on views of relevant principles of justice and BJW. A positive view of the equity principle was expected to be negatively correlated with perceived injustice. This could be proven (bivariate  $r = -.36$ ). The opposite was true for the need principle ( $r = .64$ ). The views of the two allocation principles were correlated negatively ( $r = -.37$ ).

The reasons are outlined above: The core statement of the need principle is that goods are distributed according to the needs. Thus, the mere continuing existence of differences in needs is a case of injustice. The equity principle allows differences in needs provided that the allocation of goods is corresponding to the achievements or merits. The equity principle offers arguments to defend allocations as justified even if there are people in need who get a very small part of the available goods.

BJW is also expected to have negative effects on the perception of injustice. Lerner (1977) has suggested that this belief functions as a motive either to re-establish justice in reality or in cognition. If it were very difficult or very costly to re-establish justice in reality - which would certainly be the case in the three groups of the less fortunate studied - belief in a just world would be easier to defend by reinterpreting and reappraising facts. Denial of injustice might be the consequence.

**Table II:** Multiple Regression From Perceived Injustice of Disadvantages on Attributed Responsibility, Social Attitudes, and the Justice-Related "Background" Variables ( $N = 402$ )

Predictor	$r$	beta	$b$	$F_b$	$R$	$R^2$
Need principle	.64	.43	.52	89.56	.641	.410
Interrelatedness of own advantages and disadvantages of others	.54	.22	.21	24.67	.677	.458
Attribution of negative traits	-.38	-.11	-.16	7.06	.690	.477
Disadvantages perceived as self-inflicted (intercept)	-.43	-.10	-.07	4.50*	.695	.482
			1.62			

Total- $F(4,397) = 92.49, p < .000$

\*  $.01 < pF_b < .05$

The specific scales of the view of the equity principle, the view of the need principle, and the belief in a just world (BJW) were also included in the multiple regression analysis. Only the view of the need principle has a significant effect on perceived injustice, the strongest one by far of all predictors. Mediated (indirect) effects cannot be evidenced by multiple regression analyses. Indirect effects of the view of the equity principle and of BJW mediated by attributions of responsibility and negative traits will be presented in the next section.

#### *Predicting Readiness to Prosocial Commitment from Perceived Injustice and the Ability to Support the Needy*

The path model of Figure 1 specifies perceived injustice and the perceived own possibilities to support the needy as proximal predictors, the first representing the motivational factor, the latter the ability factor. Three indicators of responsibility attributions are directly preordered to these two proximal predictors: perceived self-infliction, interrelatedness, and attributions of negative traits. The first column of predictors contains the three justice-related "background" variables.

The empirical results show that both proximal predictors contribute independently to the prediction of prosocial activities. Moreover, there are direct effects of three more distal variables: the view of the need principle, perceived interrelatedness of fates, and BJW. The first two are easy to understand: They simply add to the reported indirect effects, and they point to the substantial total impact of these two variables.

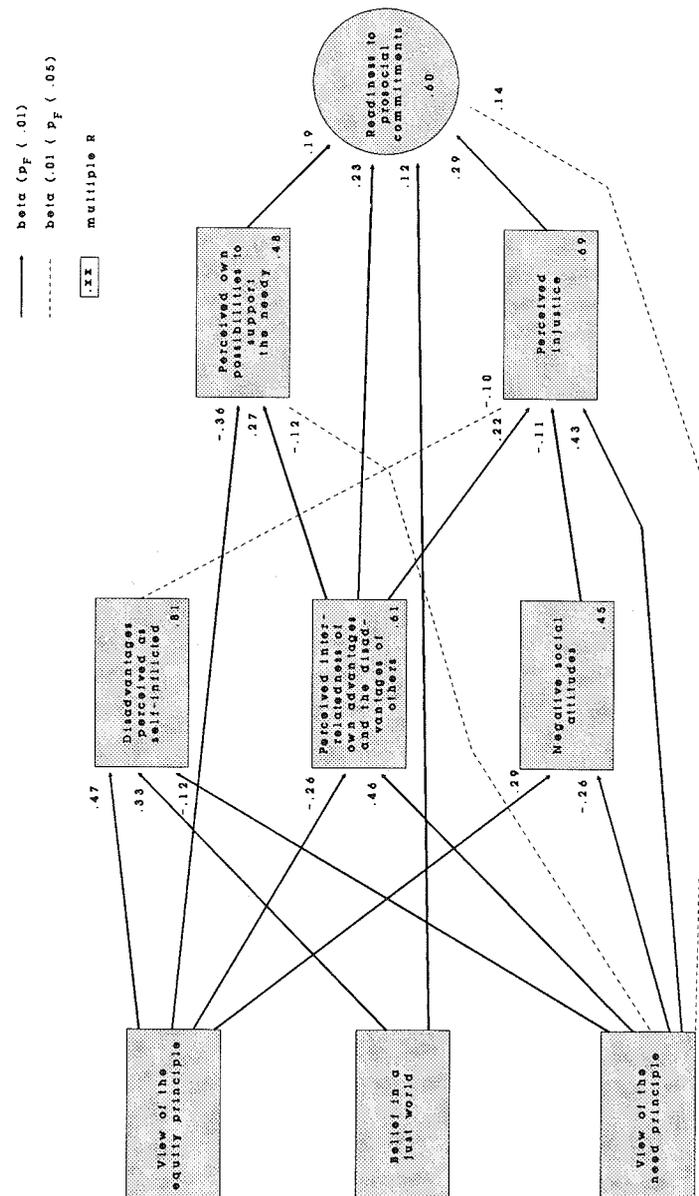


Figure 1: Pathmodel for the Prediction of Readiness to Prosocial Commitments

We would like to draw attention to the indirect effects of the background variables. The view of the need principle has strong indirect effects mediated by perceived injustice and perceived interrelatedness of fates. The view of the equity principle has negative effects on perceived injustice that are mediated by both proximal predictors and by attributions of responsibility and of negative traits. Obviously, a positive view of the equity principle disposes to blame the needy for having self-inflicted their problems and to derogate them in the sense of attributing negative traits to them. Moreover, it disposes to denying own contributions to the disadvantages by perceiving own advantages and the disadvantages of others as being interrelated. The equity principle also has an indirect effect on prosocial activities that is mediated by appraising one's own ability to support the needy. A positive view of the equity principle covaries with a denial of own possibilities to support the needy: The equity principle means that everyone has to help him- or herself, and, consequently, any possibility of outside help for the needy will be denied.

Belief in a just world has also indirect effects that are mediated by the same variables. As mentioned before, when helping is costly or risky, BJW can be defended by reappraising the facts: Assuming self-infliction of needs, contesting a causal connection between one's own advantages and the disadvantages of others, and attributing negative traits are cognitions that are apt to deny any injustice. Empirically, only the first of these proved to be related to BJW.

Overall, the results evidence the impact of the justice-related variables including the attributions of responsibility on prosocial commitments. In addition to these motivational variables, an ability factor, perceived own possibilities to support the needy, was a significant predictor, too.

### *The Justice-Related Emotions and Prosocial Commitments*

As mentioned before, three prosocial emotions had been assessed among the emotional responses to the problems and needs of the less fortunate: sympathy, moral outrage, and existential guilt. All three of these emotions dispose to prosocial activities, although there are also some important conceptual differences between them (Montada, 1990; Montada & Schneider, 1989). Conceptually, two of these emotions are based on the perception of the injustice of relative disadvantages as well as on the attribution of responsibility: existential guilt and moral outrage. Existential guilt is expected to be aroused when a subject perceives him- or herself as being responsible for the existence of a disadvantage of another person and/or for not having tried to reduce it. Guilt means blaming oneself, and reducing injustice was expected to be one way to reduce existential guilt.

Whereas guilt implies self-blame, outrage implies blaming another responsible agent or agency. Motivationally, outrage primarily disposes to accuse the offenders and to claim compensation for the victim from them or to retaliate the inflicted injustice. Protest against injustice and claiming justice from the responsible agents may indeed be effective in ensuring prosocial goals. Moreover, outrage because of unjust disadvantages of third persons indicates a commitment to them that may also

motivate charitable activities in favor of the victims. In the present study several kinds of prosocial commitment were assessed, some were more in the line of charity such as spending money, others were definitely forms of political protest such as signing a petition or participating in a demonstration to draw public attention to the justified claims of the socially disadvantaged. Therefore, moral outrage, too, was expected to predict the prosocial commitments asked for.

The third prosocial emotion assessed was sympathy with the disadvantaged. We expected - according to an extensive part of the literature - that sympathy would turn out to be the primary motive for prosocial commitments. Conceptually, sympathy is not based on perceived injustice. It only implies a concern for another person and a sharing of his or her negative feelings aroused by the existing needs and problems. As stated above, however, there are some reasons for the evidence that there is less sympathy with a victim whose needs and disadvantages are considered self-inflicted. This is true at least for contexts outside of close relationships in which love and sympathy may not depend on the explanation or the attributed responsibility for the existing need. But either way, in line with a long series of experiments and studies, we expected that sympathy would motivate altruistic activities.

The four additional emotions assessed (anger about the disadvantaged, fear to lose one's own advantages, contentment with these, hopelessness) were all expected to interfere with prosocial commitments.

The empirical evidence corroborate the hypothesized motivational role of the justice-related emotions. Prosocial commitments are substantially correlated with sympathy, moral outrage, and existential guilt and negatively with anger about the disadvantaged (Table I). The emotions that, conceptually, are not related to justice (fear to lose own advantages, contentment with these, and hopelessness) are significantly less closely associated with prosocial commitments. In a multiple regression analysis of prosocial commitment on all emotions assessed (Table III) it

Table III: Multiple Regression From Readiness to Prosocial Commitments on All Emotions ( $N = 410$ )

Predictor	$r$	beta	$b$	$F_b$	$R$	$R^2$
Moral outrage	.56	.45	.40	77.35	.555	.308
Existential guilt	.44	.16	.13	10.03	.570	.325
(intercept)			1.89			

Total- $F(2,407) = 97.89, p < .000$

turned out that only moral outrage and existential guilt had significant effects: Sympathy was not significant - contrary to the expectations suggested by all of the literature on empathy and altruism - meaning that sympathy does not make an independent contribution to the prediction of prosocial commitments in addition to moral outrage and existential guilt. Sympathy became significant only when these two emotions were omitted from the set of predictors, but in this case much less of the variance of the criterion was explained.

The most convincing explanation for this result is the following: Both guilt and outrage imply the acknowledgment that the needy are entitled to support whereas sympathy does not. (This explanation is outlined and empirically corroborated in more detail in Montada, 1990, and in Montada & Schneider, 1989.) This does not mean that sympathy does not dispose to prosocial activities. All three prosocial emotions are substantially correlated with each other and all three are correlated with prosocial commitments (Table I). We assume that both guilt and outrage will be more likely when the subject feels sympathetic toward the disadvantaged. Yet, over and above this component that they share with sympathy, they have specific components adding to the readiness to engage in prosocial activities. The shared component is represented in the regression analysis by guilt and outrage; sympathy has no further specific component that might add to the willingness to support the needy. Thus, the "credit" for the component sympathy is statistically attributed to those predictors that encompass this one and further relevant components. To our knowledge there are no other studies that have assessed sympathy, guilt, and outrage independently and that have investigated their relative impact on prosocial behavior comparatively.

#### *Readiness to More Costly Renunciation*

As stated above, perceived own ability to support the needy was a significant predictor of prosocial commitments. What does ability to support the needy mean? Certainly, the huge problems poverty poses in the developing countries cannot be solved by any single individual, and some respondents might have been under the impression that they can in no way help to change the life situation of the disadvantaged there even if they want to. Others were less pessimistic and less hopeless.

In the case studied, all subjects were certainly able to perform at least some of the prosocial activities asked for: spending some money, signing a petition to the government, participating in a protest demonstration, or joining a group whose members are working for the benefit of the disadvantaged. The first and the second of these activities, at least, can seldom be rejected by reasons of inability or a lack of resources. In these cases prosocial motives and personal norms do not have to overcome the concern with the costs of prosocial activities (Schwartz, 1977), they might have to overcome hopelessness with respect to their efficiency.

The readiness to more costly support was only asked for with respect to the unemployed some months after the first wave of data collection: the readiness to

renounce part of one's income so that new jobs might be created with the money saved. This included the readiness to give up some of one's weekly working hours without full compensation in wages (which would be an individual renunciation), to accept a freeze in usual annual raises as well as to accept an additional tax to enable the government to pay for new jobs (which would be an equal renunciation by all similar ones not just by one single individual). These renunciation might not have been easy for every respondent. The pattern of correlations with the variables of Table I remains roughly the same but the coefficients are significantly lower.

In multiple regression analyses, existential guilt (having a positive effect) and hopelessness (having a negative effect) prove to be significant predictors of the readiness to individual renunciation; anger about the disadvantaged (having a negative effect) was the only significant predictor for the readiness to accept a freeze in wages and an additional tax. Anger is also predictive for blaming the unemployed for self-infliction and for attributing responsibility to them to improve their own fate themselves instead of to the government, the economy, and so forth.

### Conclusions

We do not intend to overgeneralize the thesis of this chapter that prosocial commitments are motivated by perceived injustice. This may in fact depend on the social context and the relationships between the potential helper and the needy. The present study explores subjects' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to the needs of socially disadvantaged people with whom they are neither personally acquainted nor closely connected. In these cases, moral norms of justice seem to play an important role and perceived injustice and perceived responsibilities for the injustice will lead to either guilt or outrage depending on the attributions. These emotions will dispose to actions intended to benefit the needy or to anger about the needy, both of which would interfere with prosocial motivations and activities.

We are convinced that there are further social contexts in which fairness and norms of justice motivate prosocial activities. We might respect norms of justice even with people we dislike or with whom we compete (perhaps because this might help to justify our own life condition). In certain contexts, the wish to conform to norms of justice might be the only motive for prosocial activities - in default of other motives. However, there are other social contexts in which caring and supporting is not a matter of justice, but rather a matter of love, of sympathy, or even a matter of course as part of the role a subject has within this relationship. That is exactly what we found in a study on prosocial activities of adult children in favor of their needy parents (Montada, Schmitt, & Dalbert, in this volume). In this context, justice variables did not play a major role. Most of the variance was explained by predictors indicating the existence of a social role the children have within this relationship. The quality of the relationship makes an additional contribution. In summary, altruism may be empathic or it may be normative depending on the social context and the relationships between the participants concerned.

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